

ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY IN MEDICINE – A CHRISTIAN APPROACH.

Edited by Vincent Edmunds, M.D., M.R.C.P., and C. Gordon Storer, M.D., F.R.C.S. (Pp. VIII+197. 30s). Edinburgh and London: E. & S. Livingstone, 1967.

THIS book aims to give the findings of a medical discussion group whose members believe that Christian ethics and the application of Christian principles offer the most reliable and convincing guide in the changing responsibilities of the medical profession.

In the opening chapter Alastair M. McConnell discusses "The Nature of Responsibility". He includes an interesting review of delinquency and says that it "may run contrary to the cherished beliefs of many to view delinquency as a disease". Nevertheless it is a fact that delinquency may be associated with abnormal brain function.

Douglas McG. Jackson links "The Ethics of Clinical Research" with a consideration of responsibility and the sanctity of life. He says that the root of the moral problem as regards clinical research is man himself. Following consideration of the patient's consent and co-operation, he gives detailed practical advice for the investigator.

In the chapter on "Why the Preservation of Life?" Duncan W. Vere discusses the elderly, and says: "From whatever angle the problem is approached, we are driven back to the apparent view of Christ that the restoration of personality implies not physical renewal alone, but in such mental and spiritual surroundings as will let it flourish". There are also full reviews of the problems of euthanasia and abortion.

"There is no other discipline in medicine which carries with it so much moral and ethical responsibility as obstetrics and gynaecology," writes John Beattie under 'Therapeutic Procedures and the Sanctity of Life'. He discusses contraception, abortion, artificial insemination, A.I.D. and sterilisation. Many think that existing English law on abortion should not be greatly liberalised, is the opinion of this writer.

"Population Control," by Daniel A. Andersen and Professor Paul W. Brand is written from the point of view of Christian missionary doctors, and deals particularly with the problem in rural areas of India. They stress the need for education and for improved food supplies, and describe the work of family planning clinics. Their conclusion is: " ' ' ' the hand that helps a tired mother to postpone or to avoid her next pregnancy, is as much a part of Christ's ministry on earth as the hand that helps to bring a child to a previously childless marriage".

F. J. Roberts writes on "The Concept of Responsibility in Psychiatric Treatment", and stresses the need to regard psychologically disordered patients as responsible people. "Even the most disordered can be expected to be responsible within certain areas."

"Alcoholism and Drug Addiction" is an important chapter contributed by Basil Merriman. Alcoholism has been called the "most neglected disease of our time", and the writer declares: "It is nothing short of a tragedy that there are so few centres where early specialised treatment is available". As a result of his experience with alcoholics and drug addicts he is firmly convinced that the answer to the stresses of the twentieth century way of life is primarily a religious one.

Victor Parsons discusses homosexuality, suicide and alcoholism as "Social Aberrations—Sin, Crime or Disease?" Patients with these troubles may see the doctor first rather than the clergyman or lawyer, and it is the doctor's duty to treat the patient. Such patients need prolonged follow-up.

The ethical problems of the medical officer of health are dealt with by W. George Swann and he cites, as an illustration, the fluoridation of water which raises the ethical question of forcing the community to drink this water although some people may strongly object.

There is much common sense in "Meeting-Points of Church and Medicine" by the Rev. Dr. Hugh C. Trowell, M.D., M.R.C.P. He is "opposed to all public services of healing, but there is a place for private intercessions and ministrations in the case of committed and instructed Christians".

In the final chapter "Man Himself—The Vital Factor" based on a talk by the Rev. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, M.D., M.R.C.P., a quotation from Lister seems to be an excellent summing-up; "There is only one rule of practice, put yourself in the patient's place."

J.M.H.